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THE NAME "WHITE RUSSIA"[1]

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103 THE TERM Belorussia[2] is not well known outside the Slavic world. The area is more frequently referred to as "White Russia." Since 1917, however, use of the latter term has become a source of confusion. The Russians who fought against the Reds in the Civil War of 1918–20 were also called "White Russians." Although in Russian the term *Belorussy*, the ethnic group, and *Belye Russkie*, the political group, are easily distinguishable, there is no way of making the distinction clear in literal translation into English. Many people still cannot understand how an anti-Soviet group succeeded in organizing a republic within the Soviet Union, and why its members are called "white" after they have turned "red." In view of the general confusion, it is perhaps time to suggest that when referring to the ethnic group, the term Belorussian replace the term "White Russian" in our libraries, documents and literature.

The question is: When and why were these lands and people first called "white"?

There is no written evidence that the term White Russia (*Belaja Rus'*, *Alba Russia*) was used before 1382 (Karamzin). At that time, and probably some time before, it was known among the Poles, Livonians, Prussians, and perhaps other Germans (Lamanskij). It designated at least part, if not the whole, of present Belorussia which was at that time a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The origin and meaning of the word "white" as applied to this particular part of the country have been the subject of considerable [291] dispute. Some historians believe the term to have originated from the white clothing, smock, leggings, and homespun overcoat, which the people of this region have worn since time immemorial (Herberstein, Leroy-Beaulieu). Others attribute it to the deep snow which covers the country from October to April, and suggest that the people wore white clothes "because their country was called white" (Tatiščev). [142] Still others find the explanation in the light complexions of the people: fair skin, blond hair, and pale blue eyes (Karskij). The theory which connects the name with the white clothing of the people has apparently been officially adopted in the B. S. S. R. At least Kuzma

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2 The spelling *Byelorussia* is preferred by some translators of Soviet literature into English. The author, however, feels that the spelling *Belorussia* is adequate. The use of *y* as a vowel softener in the middle of a word is more likely to confuse the English speaking reader than to aid in pronunciation.

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